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I am not here to speak for or against the union or unionization. I was a union member during college: through collective bargaining, the UAW negotiated wages sufficient for a student working at Chrysler in the summers to put himself through Michigan State University. My father was a union steward on the Detroit police force, my grandfather a proud Ford UAW employee his whole career. So in a very real sense I owe where I am today to the union.

What brings me here today is to speak about a flawed conclusion drawn by well-intentioned people: the conclusion that graduate students are and should be treated like employees. To be sure, this conclusion is being made in order to allow our students a choice they don't currently have, the choice to vote up or down on union representation. But to professors and graduate program administrators, it is a serious issue when our students are treated like employees by anyone. These young trainees are *not* our employees; we don't think of them that way, and we don't want them to think of themselves that way. At the UM Medical School, our graduate programs recruit about 80 students each year from an applicant pool approaching 800. We select students from that pool who view graduate school as an opportunity to further their learning. Yes, that learning is guided by a professor, but it is independent. We expect and encourage students to be self-motivated, to commit to their learning, and to become very independent. We look hard to ensure that students are coming to Michigan not just because we pay a stipend; not just because it's a job, dependent on someone else to tell the student what to do every day. Throughout the training of each student, we have our sensitivities attuned to any sense that the student is being treated as the employee of a thesis advisor. Our oversight of their progress is based completely on the fact that they are *not* employees. When a graduate student views himself or herself as an employee, or when a professor thinks of a student as an employee, that is not a benign choice, it's a red flag.

At the core of graduate education is the relationship between the student and the adviser. The best mentors understand that the right measure of prodding, pleading and praising is a unique recipe for each student. Introducing a third party into that relationship jars the sensibility of anyone who understands the relationship as that of professor and student, and not of employer and employee.

Yes, our students are paid a stipend throughout their graduate training. And yes, research at Michigan is a successful and growing activity. The federal government expects universities to train students, and research is part of that training. The University of Michigan in particular is viewed as an outstanding place by the federal government to provide resources for both.

The position 'GSRA' is a human resources construct that defines how a student is paid, not how he is trained or otherwise treated. That designation means very little regarding education; it simply indicates that certain funds are being used that year to pay the stipend for that student. In fact, stipends for our graduate students come through a variety of mechanisms; the GSRA position on a federal grant is only one of them. In the medical school, a student starts out on a fellowship from the Dean's office, may be picked up by a training grant in the second year, spend the next year or two paid as a GSRA, then finish the training under a Rackham Graduate fellowship. In any academic year, a lab might have multiple students – all with the same training expectations and opportunities – paid from any one of these resources. *Nothing* differentiates the training of a fellowship student from the GSRA just because the latter is paid on a grant. We would not *tolerate* any such distinction. All students have exactly the same rights and expectations irrespective of how the stipend originated. And thesis committees evaluate student progress without regard to whether the student is a GSRA or a recipient of an individual fellowship.

If a grant is not renewed, then lab assistants, lab managers, technicians and other employees paid from that grant are at risk of losing jobs. But the graduate student faces no risk of losing his or her appointment just because the grant that funded that student's stipend is not renewed. We provide funds to continue covering the stipend, insurance and tuition for that student. Further, the thesis committee will not make any determination about the student's progress based on a funding gap of the professor. Our commitment is to the education of the student, which surpasses any commitment to the actual employees paid from that grant.

We truly value educating students at Michigan, as much as we value doing our research. We have great research programs because we have great graduate education, which in turn serves our research programs very well. This was the whole point when this system of federal funding for research and training was set up: that graduate education and discovery research are two sides of the same coin at our major universities. We are at the University because we want to train graduate students, and that training is much sought after because our students have so many choices. But the choice that works best for them is to be understood as students, and not as employees.